

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse, Neglect or Exploitation

The first step in helping abused or neglected children/vulnerable adults is learning to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove abuse is occurring, but a closer look at the situation may be warranted when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination.

Types of Abuse

The following are some signs often associated with particular types of abuse and neglect: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, financial exploitation and emotional abuse. It is important to note, however, that these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child/vulnerable adult, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child/vulnerable adult also may be neglected.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child/vulnerable adult:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, or black eyes
- Bone fractures, broken bones and skull fractures
- Seems frightened of the parents or caretaker
- Favoring or avoiding contact with a body part
- Covering or hiding certain body parts
- Limping that was not noticed before
- Open wounds, cuts, punctures especially those looking similar to items found around the house. For example, puncture wounds from a hair brush
- Untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- Sprains, dislocations
- Reports someone physically is hurting them
- Aggressive, disruptive and/or destructive behavior
- Passive, withdrawn and/or emotionless behavior

Signs of Neglect (Including Self Neglect)

Consider the possibility of neglect when the child/vulnerable adult:

- Is frequently absent

- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care
- Malnourishment, dehydration
- Confusion, depression
- Poor hygiene, soiled linens, urine stains
- Unkempt physical appearance
- Bed sores
- Child or adult reports being deprived of essentials (food, clothing, medication, supervision etc.)

Signs of Emotional or Psychological Abuse

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child/vulnerable adult:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Being extremely withdrawn and non-communicative or not-responsive
- Over/under use of eye contact
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent or caretaker or others important in the life of the child/vulnerable adult
- Child or adult reports the abuse

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child/vulnerable adult:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting

- Bruises or other injuries around the breast or genital area
- Suddenly refuses to change clothing or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease
- Runs away
- Torn, stained or bloody clothing
- Reports inappropriate touching
- Reports sexual abuse
- Inappropriately touches others in a sexual way
- Fear of being alone with adults, especially if of a particular gender

Financial Exploitation (mostly related to adults/elders)

- Unusual bank activity
- Missing social security or SSI checks
- Recent new friends residing with and/or expressing affection or interest (adults/elders)
- Missing property such as money, jewelry etc.
- Checks or documents bearing the signature of an elder or vulnerable adult who cannot write
- Missing mail or mail re-directed to a different address
- Social Security and or SSI monies not being spent on the needs of the child or adult